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County teaming up with local homeless service providers to conduct count of homeless

On one night last year, 439 homeless people were counted living in Lake County. But over the course of a year, many more people experience homelessness. In order to get an accurate count of just how many people are living without homes in our communities, the County and local homeless service providers are going out to try to find and count the homeless population in the county.

This “Point-in-Time Count” will take place in the late evening hours of Thursday, January 22. Volunteers and homeless service providers will go out in groups to find homeless individuals staying in the street and bring them to shelter. The group will track the number of homeless individuals in order to accurately evaluate the county’s homeless population. This is critical so that appropriate resources can be secured and distributed, and service options are readily available to those in need.

The final numbers are used as a component for determining the distribution of federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Of greater importance is the use of data to effectively determine the needs of the homeless.

“By gathering this information, we can determine where we can develop new or amend existing programs to meet the needs of our homeless population,” Cedric Lee, President of the Lake County Coalition for the Homeless said.

The Lake County Community Development Division has been working with the Lake County Coalition for the Homeless to ensure an accurate and complete count.

“Accuracy is extremely important. We do not want data that causes our programs to head in the wrong direction,” said Joel Williams, Senior Planner for Community Development.

Recent counts have shown a large number of women experiencing homelessness, which goes against many preconceived notions. A number of organizations aim to serve this population, including the Lake County Haven, which operates an emergency shelter and transitional housing program. The Lake County Haven has used data obtained from Point-in-Time Counts in the past to modify their program to best serve their clients.

“Serving homeless women is not a problem we were able to solve years ago and can now apply a solution to anyone who walks through our doors,” said Cindy Harger, Executive Director of the Lake County Haven. “We must constantly evolve and find new and better ways to help our clients. The Point-in-Time Count provides us with some excellent information to assist us in that evolution.”

If you are interested in learning more about the Lake County Continuum of Care or the Point-in-Time Count, please contact Joel Williams at 847.377.2139.